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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TOURISM

Abstract:

As a result of the developments in information and communication Technologies, and their widely and densely use new marketing mediums have recently emerged. A number of platforms have also appeared in product preference in terms of consumers. The masses communicate with each other on social media. Firms are looking for the ways of affecting the preferences of customers, and they use social media as a marketing environment. Today, the competition between firms has raised, therefore most firms find traditional marketing methods inadequate in reaching to their customers. Therefore, they aim to take action in every environment in which customers exist. This situation causes producing firms to; conduct marketing activities in a more number of ways in digital or virtual media.

In recent years, in tourism industry hotel services also use social media for purposes such as effective advertisement, reaching more customers and building brand loyalty. Through social media, tourism services can reach to more customer faster. Besides, customers can also quickly reach to tourism services through their social media accounts in the stages of information searching, assessment of alternatives, selecting choices and purchasing. The aim of this study is to explain how hotel services manage their Facebook accounts and which features they use, and to bring forward proposals. For this reason, Facebook accounts of these hotel services has been studied through content analysis method.

Keywords:

Tourism, Communication Technologies, Social Media

Introduction

Information and communication technology institutions remarkably affect the businesses and individuals. With the development of internet since 1990s, which is the most important element of information and communication technology, there have been essential changes brought into the business processes and life styles. One of these essential changes is trading. In fact, a new World structure has been formed and this structure called virtual platform, by removing the borders, has become an ever-growing mass medium. Using internet as a purchasing channel, with the rapid growths taking place in the substructures of computer software and telecommunication, has experienced a raise. In the light of all these developments, social relationships have changed and people started to do their daily relationships and work lives in different dimensions.

Social media is one of the new domains of marketing. The use of social media has importance for firms, because today media tools have been used for marketing communication. Social media has become a totally new channel for firms, and by using social media the importance of marketing approach has increased.

Especially with the development of technology and the invention and development of computer and widespread emergence of web, for firms conveying the messages to target in a short time has increased. Furthermore, opportunity of evaluating the target market satisfaction is a good example.

1. Internet in Tourism

www is a network that spans the world and it is one of the applications of the internet developed after ftp and e-mail communication tools. However, this concept is used synonymously with the Internet. It is composed of information clusters connected with links and these clusters get bigger and bigger. The information is coded according to the HTTP protocol and is displayed through the browser software (Altun, 2005:102-103).

With the enormous amount of information potentially available to travelers, the Internet constitutes an important platform for information exchange between the consumer and industry suppliers (e.g., hotels, transportation sectors), intermediaries (e.g., travel agents), controllers (e.g., governments and administrative bodies), as well as many non-profit organizations such as destination marketing organizations (Zheng Xiang and Ulrike Gretzel, 2010:180)

The information is on the Web pages and these Web pages may contain a wide variety of things. These are formatted text, images, sounds, videos, Java Applets and forms, (Barrett, 2000:25). Moreover, Web-based platforms allow for 'real-time' recording and sharing of tourism experiences and thereby add to advances of personal virtual identities and this is further supported by the ubiquitous availability of Internet access in most European travel destinations (Ana Maria Munar and Jens Kr. Steen Jacobsen, 2014:46).

Technology increases hotel enterprises' competitiveness and organizational performance. Hotel enterprises are the most active users of internet in the area of international marketing and advertising. For this reason, hotels use their websites to take advantage of this opportunity. Web sites should attract visitors through the information they offer and convert these visitors to consumers, because websites play an important role in consumers' decision-making process. Web pages should make the consumers do shopping and revisit the site another time with their rich and compelling content (quoted Ozdipciner, 2010:13).

A study conducted in Turkey on web design of hotels showed that web pages are used as a classic channel that provides information about services and products not as a profitable electronic platform. In another study, it was found that websites with good content, a simple design, few grammar errors, provide more confidence to users. Therefore, it is important to choose the right content. Simple design also makes the site both fast and simple (Bayram and Yayli, 2009:358).

Thanks to www, hotels meet a very important and necessary service. Hotels are constantly renewing themselves, and are making their own advertisement and marketing. Hotels want to deal with customers directly using less travel agencies and tour operators. Therefore, hotels have become establishments providing services on electronic marketing in the tourism sector through the web sites and databases they established. Hotels not only make advertisement about their services and establishments for the customers through the Internet sites but also offer reservations through their own network they established on a virtual environment. However, hotel executives are questioning the effectiveness of social media in driving hotel guests' booking behaviors, top managers and owners are pressuring hotel marketers to justify the increasing budget of social media marketing (Woo Gon Kim, Hyunjung Lim and Robert A. Brymer, 2015:166) These factors increase the popularity of the hotels (Ansen and Fırat, 2009:123). Achieving a better online review can lead to positive testimonials, great eWOM communication, and a strong brand reputation for a hotel (Woo Gon Kim, Hyunjung Lim and Robert A. Brymer, 2015:170).

The quality of the web site has a direct influence on consumer satisfaction and purchasing behavior in a positive way. For this reason, web pages, their functionality and web site design are crucially important for the consumers who are in the decision-making process (Bayram and Yaylı, 2009: 352).

Web 1.0 refers to the first stage of development of the World Wide Web when websites were not yet providing user-generated content and the evolution of Web 1.0 is known as Web 2.0 or social media which adopt many different forms (Ana Maria Munar and Jens Kr. Steen Jacobsen, 2014:46). Web 2.0 brought an unprecedented changes for web sites in online user behaviors. In the past, they were only environments in which the visitors were viewing personal and stable contents, but after web 2.0 has come up, the web sites have become participatory, dynamic and interactive. In creating and enriching the websites with Web 2.0, now the users are also able to attend actively (www.vikipedia.org).

2. Social Media

The social media is a website that enables to achieve with web 2.0 technologies to a deeper social interaction, community formation and the cooperation projects. In other words, the social media can also be described as social content websites that enables users to express themselves, to communicate, join the groups and to contribute this environment with their comments and posts (Akar, 2010:17). Soytürk defines the websites as a generic name for all platforms where the user content is spreading around or being published. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Benxiang Zeng and Rolf Gerritsen, 2014:27). On the other hand, the social media content is the user itself (Soytürk, 2009: 58).

Social media continues to grow and increasingly influence many social and economic aspects of the tourism industry and social media is fundamentally changing the way of tourists' search, find, read and trust, as well as collaboratively produce information about tourism suppliers and tourism destinations (Benxiang Zeng and Rolf Gerritsen, 2014:33). Enabling the user to express themselves and revealing their preferences in the online environment makes him different and popular and in marketing the future social media, it is predicted to play a key role. Social media has many internet-based channel. Blogs, video and picture sharing sites, social networks, on the microblog, wikis, podcasts and e-mailing are the main social media channels. Making activities in these channels without costs, the establishment of contacts with customers and the shortest way to achieve in reaching their ideas and suggestions have great advantages for all types of businesses (Köksal and Özdemir, 2013: 326).

In developing the web and as the program version revealed in representing these developments, as a term we can mention about Web 2.0. The first thing that comes up to our minds about Web 2.0 is the wikis where the users can create the contents and it can also be defined as the whole information where the users create the communication and the social media tools collectively as an income. Over time, the use of it is simplified and have become widespread. Thanks to Web 2.0 technologies, the new economic and social values have emerged. In mentioning these, it is valuable to use the network, the users can create the contents, the people who do not know each other are able to communicate and the firms started to invest in this field (Schuen, 2008:73). Modelling strategic management for the development of competitive advantage of firms and organizations in different sectors may employ new technologies and social media in their marketing strategies (Alzbeta Kiralova and Antonin Pavliceka, 2015:364).

Social media has some basic features. Such as in the following:

Participation: Social media encourages everyone who enthusiastic in providing feedback and in contributing. In making this, the indistinct line between the media and the masses and the definition between them are minimized, which are defined as "content creator" and as "follower".

Clarity: Most of the social media services are open for feedbacks and contributions. Voting, interpretation and the sharing of information are encouraged. In reaching and using the content they might very rarely be obstacles. Already, the password protected contents are not suggested by the users.

Dialogue: Whereas the traditional media was related with "publishing" (the content is presented to the audience from a source), the social media has a two-way communication and interaction.

Community: Social media helps the community to gather quickly and communicate effectively. The communities share the common interest.

To be linked with: Social media develops the features of the websites that linked with each other and helps the other sites by giving them sources or links (ICrossinf, 2008:5).

E-tourism is improving throughout the last 3 decades. Mariani emphasizes three main axis within the e-tourism research. The first one is Technological innovations, second one is industry functions and the last one is consumer and demand dimensions. The technological innovations has a crucial importance which are generally related to the accessibility and usability of multimedia tools, mobile and wireless technologies, local wireless networks and web design. The second one (industry functions) includes the marketing and distributions of these technological innovations. The third and last one is related with the customers and marketing. This axis also includes the improving of the tools which will be used on the whole process. With the emerge of Web 2.0, social media has become the mega-trend in tourism sector. People start to communicate with each other on these virtual communities about their ideas and they also start to exchange their thoughts. TripAdvisor (www.tripadvisor.com) is one of the most successful examples of a virtual community in tourism: it facilitates the reviewing of hotels, restaurants, and destinations around the world and brings together individuals in discussion forums. The system provides users with independent travel reviews and comments written by TripAdvisor members and expert advisors, and represents a powerful platform for interaction among peers (Mariani vd., 2016:322).

One of the subjects that given importance by the marketing department employees is improving their awareness and making communication with the existing/potential customers without any time and place constraints within the promotion activities (Barutcu, 2011: 8). Social media is an important solution about this issue. Social media is not only suitable for the multinational businesses but also for the big businesses, SMES and even nonprofit state institutions (Kaplan and Haenline, 2010: 67). Social media is an online source that people use to share news, gossips, ideas, comics, articles, pictures, videos and these sources includes blogs, vlogs, social networks, podcasts, wikies and message boards. These days, social media which becomes an important trend is now an important marketing opportunity that making businesses meets with the customers directly. Social media provides to the businesses more effective and less cost communication with the final consumers comparing to the traditional communication tools (Kaplan and Haenline, 2010). These days' social media

which is improving constantly becomes an important center that makes the mutual dialog possible between people. Facebook and similar social network sites usually provide social cues that are richer than that found in other types of platforms such as review sites or media sharing sites (Ana Maria Munar and Jens Kr. Steen Jacobsen, 2014:52). As social media changed the way of communication between consumers and businesses, it also changed the way of doing the job in many ways. Businesses are using the social media increasingly to protect their brand image, raising their awareness, to give trust, to access their existing customers and gaining the new ones (Mills, 2012: 162-163).

In tourism not only national but also international competition is possible. As businesses and customers are passing the traditional lines because of their buying, selling or other commercial transactions resulting from the global competition, the borders of the national marketing are becoming lost or uncertain. The new vision foresees that businesses should operate worldwide instead of one country and for that they should use their core abilities and knowledge effectively (Demirci and Aydemir, 2008: 9).

There are seven ways to measure the social media effectiveness of the businesses according to the Barutcu and Tomas who are transmitting it from the Hawks. The first one is measuring the brand awareness. Businesses can measure this with the follower's number of the brands, search number, number of the visitors that directed by the links to the websites, number of the searched keywords related with the brand. The second one is following of the honest discussions. Online discussions are honest and uncensored discussions between consumers. Businesses can gather positive, negative or neutral comments about their brand. Businesses should follow the comments that is done about their brands and competitor's brand via monitoring programs. It is very important for businesses to address complaints in order to make customers feel that their problems are addressed and are handled seriously by the firms because such treatments relieve customer dissatisfaction and prevent negative WOM (Woo Gon Kim, Hyunjung Lim and Robert A. Brymer, 2015:167). The third one is measuring the impact area. Businesses can reach to the impact signs via the numbers of links connected to their websites. There can be individuals who likes the product and comments about the brand on the social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and microblog. Why individuals like or didn't like can be analyze when the social media tweets and likes examine. The fourth one is interaction indicator. Individuals are important to see how they respond to the offers and talks of the business and the interaction between the brand and web site of the business. The interaction indicator can be detected by the numbers of Facebook likes, seen numbers of the photographs and videos, retweets, numbers of the positive and negative comments about the brand and the rating ratio that given to the brand of the business. The fifth measurement is popularity of the business. The numbers of the followers on the Twitter page, the member numbers of the RSS and websites of the business, member numbers of the LinkedIn groups and numbers of the likers on Facebook or the other social media pages can show us the popularity rate of the business on the social media. The sixth way of measurement is using the monitoring tools. If businesses are not following, watching or measuring the

information on the social networks, the numbers of the tweets and likes on the Facebook means nothing alone. The reacts of the individuals can be learn with the tools that developed for data analysis such as Google Analytics and the campaigns can be changed depending on that. Lastly, businesses can make changes with their products or campaigns by learning the critics and requests of the consumers from the positive, negative or neutral comments on the social media sites (Barutcu and Tomaş, 2013:16-18).

Table 1. Regulated Measurements for Social Media Applications

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM	BRAND AWARENESS	BRAND LOYALTY	WORD OF MOUTH (WOM)
Facebook	Member, fan numbers Placement number of the application Number of effect Number of sign Criticism/Value and number of Point (-/+)	Comment numbers Active User numbers Number of Likes Content numbers created by the users Measurements of application usage Activity rate (How often users updating their pages)	Displayed frequency on your Friend's walls Number of sending to the wall Number of sharing and sending Number of reply to the friend recommendations
Blogs	Singular visit numbers Singular return visit numbers Marking numbers Search Rankings	Number of Members Number of Comments The amount of created content Average time spending on the site Voting, Return numbers to the surveys or competitions	Number of Likes Reference numbers sending to other media Reblog number
Microblogging Twitter	Tweet number about the Brand Value of the Tweet (-,+) Number of Followers	Number of Followers @number of replies	Tweet return number

Source (Barutcu and Tomas, 2013:16-18).

It is seen that hospitalities use the social media which causes great changes on the communication habits for making the announcement of the promotions and activities, introducing themselves to the foreign tourists with a less cost, creating loyal customers by understanding the changing consumer's behavior because of the new technologies, making the complaint following faster and especially being different on the competition

with a more effective communication. If a hospitality not doing any social media activity such as writing on a blog, opening a page on the Facebook and Tweeting, that means they are losing great opportunities on the digital marketing (Eryılmaz and Zengin, 2014: 48).

3. Facebook, as a Social Media

After the usage of the American university students and reached the worldwide internet users, Facebook has become the most popular website among the social websites. The reason why it has become so popular, it has made a continuous innovation and change and did not stay where it was. These changes show its respect towards the users. Basically, Facebook provides useful activities such as: profile creation, establish groups, ability to upload and share pictures and videos, and lastly source of news services. Using social media in tourism education is also an emerging topic, based on the fact that students are one of the main users of social media, particularly of Facebook (Benxiang Zeng and Rolf Gerritsen, 2014:33). Apart from these, the users can also play online games and send message to each other. Renewing itself continually and enriching the content, Facebook enables the users an efficient use. Owing to these features, the number of the members of Farmville, which is getting more and more popular day by day in our country, is increasing. Some users even prefer and open a Facebook account only for this purpose. For this reason, it is one of the most popular website in our country (www.alexa.com).

According to Assenov and Khurana (Eryılmaz and Zengin, 2014: 19), the reasons why the accommodation services use Facebook social website are mentioned such in the following:

- Advertise Special Offers: The declare the promotions, sales and last minute offers in accommodation services.

- To Declare the Special Cost Offers for Facebook Fans: At this point, the accommodation businesses can increase the numbers of their members by encouraging the members to click 'fans' button or the 'like' button, thus they can reach them easily.

- Use it as a Competitive Tool: Telling the marginal sides, reminding its name to the costumers and through this competitive tool they can show their quality to the users.

- Advertising the Hotel: The accommodation businesses that have many equipment features can advertise their whole features at one page.

- Making Survey Applications: The costumers can tell their likes or dislikes through Facebook.

- Announcement of the Activities: The accommodation businesses can announce their activities however they like or they can even create an invitation card on Facebook.

- Reservations: The costumers can also make their reservations from the Facebook website.

- Declaring the Latest News: Facebook is an effective channel in declaring the costumers the latest news. This channel may even be the most effective and the quickest way in reaching the target market.

The Analysis of the user portfolio of Facebook:

February 2004: began to be used Facebook. December 2004: Facebook has reached 1 million active users. December 2005: Facebook has reached 5.5 million active users. December 2006: Facebook has reached 12 million active users. April 2007: Facebook has reached 20 million active users. Oct. 2007: Facebook has reached 50 million active users. August 2008: Facebook has reached 100 million active users. January 2009: Facebook has reached 150 million active users. February 2009: Facebook reached 175 million active users. April 2009: Facebook has reached 200 million active users. July 2009: Facebook has reached 250 million active users. September 2009: Facebook reached 300 million active users (Levy, 2010: 9).

The use of Facebook scores are as follows:

Every day (worldwide), more than 5 billion minutes are spent on Facebook. 30 million users update their status at least once every day. 8 million users, it is open every day fan page. Has 120 million users log on to Facebook every day. 1 billion photos uploaded to Facebook each month. 10 million videos are uploaded each month to Facebook. Every week 1 billion social objects are shared. 2.5 million events are created each week. There are 45 million active users of Facebook groups. 30 million users and provides access Facebook via mobile phone (Levy, 2010: 9).

Is it possible to benefit from this region which is so big and high speed development?

So why is everyone running to join Facebook? Facebook seemed to come of age at a time when simple and functional design wins out. Over the years, Facebook has continued to maintain a clean, organized user interface despite adding tons of new features. Facebook is similar to Google in that way. Besides being a superior search engine compared to Yahoo, MSN, and others, Google wins over users because it is simple and easy to use, yet is a powerful engine. Facebook represents the same for the social networking space.

Facebook provides an easy-to-understand interface, thus making it appeal to all ages. For the less tech savvy, it is manageable without a lot of help. Those that are tech savvy can take full advantage of the multitude of settings, options, and flexibility of the platform to share and engage (Levy, 2010:10).

Other than being an individual and entertainment, Facebook is an invaluable marketing environment where the businesses can show their selves, products, and brands. Apart

from these, by getting more and more members, they can reach to a wider mass and advertise themselves better than anything else. By marketing through Facebook, the greatest value is to view the costumers from a clear perspective in accordance with their demands and personal information. Financially, marketing through Facebook does not cost too much to the business. On the other hand, in terms of marketing, by reaching up to date information, the data are collected at a data base by Facebook, through the personal data it is able make costumer analysis and it also enables to spread the adverts to a wider mass. (Akar, 2010: 140).

4. The Method of the Research

The importance of communicational technology in terms of tourism is significant. Especially, the cost of service is usually made through online at times when the service is far away and made before the usage time. For this reason, it is important for the businesses to know the usability of social media.

The method of the research is based on content. "The analysis of the content is a method that searches the social media where the contents is not identified clearly and the features of the contents are identified clearly." (Gökçe, 2001: 25).

The aim of this research is to analyze the usability of Facebook by hotels and to put forward the available usage of it. In analyzing the Facebook accounts, an evaluation form has been used made by the researcher. According to the classification, the possibility of variability is determined and mentioned, then evaluated with the SPSS 16.0 Statistic program.

In getting the exemplification, from TUI's (Touristic Union International), which is the biggest tour operator in Europe, the best hotels in the world in 2015 are analyzed. As the exemplification of the research, 100 Hotels were used chosen by TUI. But account examinations of this three hotels that are not professional and individually prepared were excluded. Accordingly, 97 hotels were taken examination. For this issue, research was made in February, 2016.

5. The Findings of Research

Time of creating a Facebook account, time of latest sharing and all hotels Facebook accounts as regards their sharing features were examined. 97% of hotels have Facebook account. The numbers of sharing of hotels are nearly 40. When looking at the latest date of sharing, it was seen that 80% of hotel business shared at the last week of examination time

Marketing activities of hotel business has been examined at Table 1. According to this, there are negative and positive comments on Facebook pages of 68% hotel business Facebook accounts. But there is not at 32%. Rate of replying negative comments is only 12%. 31% of hotels have online booking link.

Table 1. Marketing Activities

Feature	Existent	Non-existent
Negative and Positive Comments	68%	32%
Replying to Negative Comments	12%	88%
Online Booking Button	31%	69%

Table 2 shows features of hotel business in terms of advertising activities. According to this, general view, rooms and location of business take place in Facebook pages of hotels. All hotels have number of likes. There is check – in of customers in all hotels Facebook pages. All hotels share advertising photos on their Facebook pages. It was detected that video using rate is 45% for advertising.

Table 2. Advertising Activities

Feature	Existent	Non-existent
General Information of Hotel	87%	13%
Number of Likes	100%	0%
Check - in	100%	0%
Photograph	100%	0%
Video	45%	55%

Contact information of hotels can be seen at Table 3. There is telephone number at 59% of hotels Facebook pages and there is mail address at 5% of hotels Facebook pages. Rate of hotels that give links to their websites from Facebook pages is 42%. Rate of hotels that use online map application is 68%.

Table 3. Contact Information

Feature	Existent	Non-existent
Telephone	59%	38%
E-mail	5%	95%

Website Link	42%	58%
Online Map	68%	32%

Table 4 shows that, the best 100 hotels in 2015 which they use social media. According to this, the most commonly used social media by hotels are Facebook and Twitter. Then respectively, the most commonly used social medias are Google+, Youtube, Pinterest, Instagram, Blog, Flickr, LinkedIn, Tripadvisor, Googlebookmark, Foursquare and Swarm.

Table 4. Use of Social Media

Social Media Regions	In use	Out of use
Facebook	97%	3%
Twitter	95%	5%
Google+	81%	19%
Youtube	51%	49%
Pinterest	50%	50%
Instagram	45%	55%
Blog	37%	63%
Flickr	34%	66%
LinkedIn	30%	70%
Tripadvisor	30%	70%
Googlebookmark	28%	72%
Foursquare	25%	75%
Swarm	25%	75%

When countries array in terms of number of likes, the first country is Maldives. Thus, it can be understood that all hotels can be managed very well their Facebook pages at Maldives.

Table 5. The number of Likes

Country	The Average of Likes
MALDIVES	23805
EGYPT	5164
GERMANY	5035
GREECE	4688
SPAIN - CANARY ISLANDS	2655
TURKEY	2352
MEXICO	2293
CROATIA	1567
BULGARIA	1044
PORTUGAL	912
SPAIN - PENINSULA	889
SPAIN - BALEARIC ISLANDS	670
CYPRUS	297
MAURITIUS	108
CAPE VERDE ISLANDS	103
TANZANIA	84
ITALY	55

6. Result

Almost all hotels have Facebook account and they actively use it. They regularly share on Facebook about hotel and it can be said accounts are update. The presence of

positive and negative feedback in the Facebook accounts of hotels shows that these hotels are transparency. But it was detected that rate of replying to negative sharing and comments was low. Facebook pages are good occasions that consumers can register and can say their opinions as sincere. If hotels would like to dependence of companies, they should care about users sharing. Complaint handling is also important, in order to avoid negative word-of-mouth because of that there should be a publicized channel through which feedback can be easily directed, so unhappy users can easily contact the social media company (Evangelos Christou, 2015:612-613). Hotel management should care about this issue and they should reply the negative sharing and comments on behalf of hotel. Public relations officer should turn negative opinions to positive.

There are links about online booking on hotels Facebook pages. It will be good for the other hotels if they use it. Hotels share photos of rooms etc. but there is not so much concern for videos. As known, on YouTube visual contents can watch million times in a few hours.

The most commonly used social medias are Facebook, Twitter and Google+. In terms of advertising and promotion it will be good using the other social medias like YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, Blog, Flickr, LinkedIn, TripAdvisor, Google bookmark, Foursquare and Swarm. Especially YouTube is very convenient in terms of video advertising. But half of the surveyed hotels don't use it.

It is the best way that maintains relationships with customers is to use these types of social media networking. Accordingly, it needs to use effectively social media.

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